The Maverick Mr Cube: the resurgence of commercial marketing in post-war Britain

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This paper is a key case study in both the history of commercial marketing and the inter-relationship between business and politics via an examination of the post-war Labour government's stated intention to nationalise sugar.

In response to this decision, taken by a freely elected government, the sugar industry adopted an intense marketing campaign with a view to 'informing' the public in the hope that they might choose to stand up to the State. In so doing, the marketing industry was inextricably drawn into politics and, it is argued, for the first time adopted an ostensibly party political stance.

By focussing on this cause in the brief period 1949-52, a key moment in British marketing history is explored and the contested role of marketing in modern society is set out.

The impact of the Second World War on British society was widespread, not least in the extraordinary conclusion to that conflict on the domestic front that evicted the highly popular wartime Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in favour of Clement Attlee's radical Labour administration. Clearly, the implications of this reforming government touched every aspect of life and industry, along with its spokespeople in advertising and marketing, was not immune to the sweeping changes that Labour sought to implement. Within this schematic, one key event was to have major implications for the continued authority of that government and also the complexion of the advertising and marketing industry.

In April 1949, the Government announced their intention to nationalise sugar refining and thereby set in motion a course of events that was not only in part responsible for the slashing of Labour's landslide 1945 majority to just six seats but called on those representing commercial marketing in the UK to take a stance on the political battlefield. This paper argues that the case of the government's plans to nationalise sugar and the resulting reaction of the refining industry, represented in the guise of Tate & Lyle's Mr Cube campaign, unequivocally shifted the position of commercial marketers calling on them to make their political position blatantly clear. Irrespective of what contemporaries said in defence of that campaign, it was obviously political in nature whilst deploying a range of commercial marketing techniques and practices in order to carry the day. At the heart of the campaign was the cartoon character Mr Cube who used all the guile, charm and cunning of FMCG marketing in an effort to shape the political agenda.

There are secondary sources containing more than cursory references to the originality of Mr Cube's anti-nationalisation campaign (Crofts 1989 and Chalmin 1990) but in terms of post-war historiography, the political, public relations (PR) and psephological successes, have generally been neglected or understated. Psephology was a neologism shoehorned into the lexicon of electoral commentary in the post-war period but a Labour landslide of 186 reduced to 6 in February 1950 and a near three million increase in the Tory vote over 1945, suggests it was hardly uninfluenced by Mr Cube's unique campaigning. The neglect of this lesson in political economy and political advertising is regrettable given the rich contemporary sources available. This includes an invaluable collection of campaign articles and speeches drawn together in a book edited by Company President, Leonard Lyle (1954). There is also original work on ground-breaking public relations strategies by two American writers, H. H. Wilson (1951) and A. A. Rogow (1952), and a potted history of Mr Cube in Noon (2001).

Centuries of global expansion have established sugar as intensely political and it was fitting that Mr Cube's birth and baptism occurred during a PR campaign, waged by an Imperial sugar company owning plantations in Jamaica and Trinidad, against Labour Government plans to nationalise the British refining industry. Peter Runge, a Tates spokesman reflecting on their campaign when addressing a group of PR experts in January 1950 said

> we were strongly advised to have a cartoon character who, if he caught the public's imagination, could say the most outrageous things and get away with it, and who could act as a buffer between the public and Tate & Lyle (quoted in Lyle 1954, 116).

Anthony Hugill another member of the strategy team reminisced at the end of the 1970s how the campaign 'was not Tate & Lyle's, nor Lord Lyle's, but Mr Cube's' (1978, 159). He was the little man pitched against the socialist

Goliath, armed with the sword and shield of free enterprise, and the appropriate 'cold war' sound bites that made Labour politicians, especially deputy Prime Minister Herbert Morrison, apoplectic with rage and frustration at not being able to curb this excess. He became an invaluable 'illustrative ally' not only for a by then rejuvenated Conservative Party but also we would argue for a revitalised, and politicised, sphere of commercial advertising and marketing.

AUSTERITY BRITAIN

Emerging from the Second World War, business in general and commercial marketing in particular faced a new challenge in the form of the landslide victory of a socialist administration over a Conservative opposition that had been routed and appeared in danger of terminal decline. The fear 'was not that the Conservative Party had missed its turn...but that it would never get another' (Schwartz 1991, 150). It was their Waterloo moment and arguably as devastating a defeat as in 1846 or 1906. Throughout the election campaign of 1945 Labour had spoken extensively of the prospect of the nationalisation of key industries and, with it, a fundamental change in the nature of the business world. Indeed The Economist at the end of that seismic year commented that 'the voters were not so naïve as to imagine that they could get a Labour government without a Socialist policy' (Rogow 1955, 156) given that 'Socialism involves a radical transformation of incentives and motivations' a 'shift in the words of R. H. Tawney from an acquisitive to a functional society' (Rogow 1952, 203) the tone of the Labour Government had been at best cool towards the manufacturers of acquisitiveness. That unfriendliness towards the marketing activities of business spilled over on occasion to probing their place within a collectivist state (Rogow 1952, 203).

The Daily Mirror in January 1946 emphasised that 'the first and essential task which faces this nation is to get on its feet by means of the export trade' and then 'as industry develops there will be more and more things available for the consumer at home' (quoted in Sissons and French 1976, 36). The reality of this period, according to Bargielowska, was that the 'reduction in consumer expenditure was unprecedented in British history in terms of magnitude and duration' (1996, 81). Consequently Labour's promise of jam tomorrow and the constant exhortation and 'informed advertising' of government relating to production priorities in the allocation of scarce economic resources had little resonance, not only amongst commercial marketers, who actually demonstrated remarkable restraint, but crucially amongst housewives who were genuinely more concerned about their point in the queues for rations, than points about production and the export trade.

Indeed, in the first years of the Labour Government, business appears to have done little to stimulate consumer demand and, for a variety of reasons, took a 'socially responsible' role within this setting. There had been little evidence of life and vitality in commercial advertising, or indeed reaction, in the early post-war years in the face of Labour's early antipathy towards the industry as demonstrated by Hugh Dalton, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when presenting his austerity Budget to the House of Commons in November 1947. He and his Government viewed advertising and marketing as a serious misallocation of scarce resources. In that budget speech he observed how, at present, expenditure on advertising was allowed as an expense against business profits but how, 'in these days much of the advertising was a serious waste of money, of labour and of material' (quoted in The Times, 13 November 1947, 4). In response he proposed that only one-half of advertising expenditure would be allowable as a business expense. Despite this major threat to the advertising industry and to business, the actions of the Federation of British Industry (FBI), whilst designed to prevent this draconian measure through the creation of the 'Voluntary Plan for the Limitation of Advertising', did little to stand in direct opposition to the apparent political complexion of the nation.

The Voluntary Plan was a pledge brokered between the government and the FBI which came into operation in February 1948. Under its terms, business pledged to make a 15 per cent reduction in advertising expenditure on a list of designated goods, chiefly scarce and rationed products. At the same time these organisations also undertook that their advertising would be,

> conducted and the tone of copy arranged as to avoid increasing inflationary pressure and to further agreed "national objectives" (Journal of the Advertising Association, January/March 1949, 9).

This represented a significant departure in the nature of commercial marketing and the broader role and responsibilities of advertising within society. Whereas previously business had largely been at liberty to promote their business as they saw fit, they were now being called on to adopt a more overtly corporatist position, and what is more, a position often opposed to their natural inclinations. Yet, in setting up the Voluntary Plan the FBI felt obliged to pander to the wishes of the government, if only to avoid more draconian measures. Thus, their Advertising Sub-Committee concluded,

> The advertiser will use his best endeavours to arrange the tone of his "copy", and if necessary his choice of media, in accordance with the spirit of this voluntary scheme, which is to refrain from increasing inflationary pressure of demand for scarce or rationed goods and services, and where possible to spread an understanding of the country's economic difficulties (Minutes, 6 January 1948. MRC MSS 200/F/3/E5/11/7. Emphasis added).

Nevertheless, the life of the Voluntary Plan was to prove short-lived as industry and their marketers turned their attention to a more forthright protection of their interests. In this climate of grey austerity, mounting economic difficulties, and a government ideologically obsessed with nationalising the 'commanding heights' of industry, advertising and marketing would eventually become political battlegrounds. Ironically the commodity which would galvanise the fight back against the 'socialist hydra' was not steel but sugar and remarkably a generic and hitherto undifferentiated product helped highlight issues about consumption and not just the 'productionist' issues, which had become a government fixation.

In post-war Britain, sugar was to become a field of contention with 'the white stuff' being both fact and metaphor for the treats and sweet things in life that were conspicuously absent in this era of austerity. Whilst, initially, the country stood by the collectivist experiment embodied in the Attlee Government, there was a

> hope of release from the long grinding privations of wartime life...release from the small, dull, makeshift meals, from darkness and drabness and making do, from the depressing nerve aching, never ending need to be careful (Sissons and French 1976, 35).

The premium on vigilance and frugality as the promise of a good time coming soon was thwarted by reconstruction needs meant that everyone had to become an expert on the 'points' values given to the plethora of rationed items. Peter Hennessey reflects on 'the pleasure that an occasional 'off ration' treat must have brought' which was as understandable as 'how an entire nation could become obsessed with food' (Hennessey 1992, 50).

The 'productionist' mind set of historians who declare that sugar was hardly a 'commanding height' and who ignore the more than metaphorical context of privation, pay no heed to the fundamental fact that food has always been the biggest industry of all, and that there was a Ministry of Food but no Ministry of Commanding Heights during the Second World War. It also displays a basic lack of empathy for the housewives who commercial advertisers and marketers were acutely sensitive to albeit for pecuniary reasons. Low food morale and housewife dissatisfaction translated much more quickly into the politics of everyday experience than the much more vaunted and exaggerated politics of steel nationalisation. Susan Cooper reminds us that 'wars end tidily in the history books' but that 'there was no single finishing line for the shortages of food, clothes and fuel' which gave such 'a dull grey tinge to post-war life' (Sissons and French 1976, 53).

THE SPECTRE OF LABOUR'S CLAUSE 4 AND THE PIVOTAL YEAR, 1949

Anrnold Rogow notes,

> Nationalisation had so far been acceptable to important elements in industry, and business had been allowed to retain a substantial measure of self government...Privately at least, many industrialists were of the opinion that the Labour Government had proved far more cooperative than had been expected. But in 1948-1949 there were second thoughts on both sides (Rogow 1952, 213).

These qualms were conditioned by a further raft of nationalisation proposals that shattered the calm that had surprisingly characterised relations between Government and Industry in the immediate post-war years. Having tranquilly acquired coal, aviation and the Bank of England, Labour announced in April 1949 a fresh 'shopping list' of items for social ownership. It included industrial assurance, meat wholesaling and slaughtering, water supplies, the cement industry and sugar refining. Not only did critics argue that the latter proposal came out of the blue, but K. O. Morgan argues that 'in terms of propaganda and public relations, it was a foolish choice'. There was obviously 'no sense among the general public that anything was seriously amiss with the sugar and the syrup that appeared on their breakfast tables' (1984, 124). In the run up to what is now referred to as the 'dead heat' 1950 General Election (with its attendant Lazarus like revival of Conservatism) the fight against this increasingly unpopular Government policy was centred on the nationalisation of the refineries.

The Party conference in Blackpool in June gave the Manifesto Labour Believes in Britain a rubber stamp reception, which meant that with cursory attention to detail, policy for the next election was that 'Labour intends to transfer to public ownership all the sugar manufacturing and refining concerns' (Lyle 1954, 11). There had been no efforts to consult or even visit refineries which left the Government vulnerable to the charge that they were only concerned with nationalisation for ideological reasons and that they had given no thought to the best interests of the consumer or the nuts and bolts organisation and efficiency of the industry. Tate & Lyle, the sugar giant whose denial that it was a private monopoly was as unconvincing as its international reputation for high efficiency and low costs, was in comparison to the Government well prepared for a fight after years of nationalisation rumours. It had already received an apology from a Labour MP Ernest Davies who in a lecture early in 1949 described Tate & Lyle as 'one of the biggest rackets there is' (quoted in Hugill 1978, 146).

The company President, Lord Lyle of Westbourne, a formidable former Conservative MP and close friend of Opposition leader Winston Churchill and his favourite 'chela', Brendan Bracken, Tory MP and owner of The

Economist and Financial Times, had already declared war on the nationalisers. At the company AGM in March he confirmed that

> if your company is assailed by the nationalisers...I shall ask your shareholders in Britain and overseas to give counsel to your Board at an extraordinary General Meeting, and I shall also consult with the authorities in many lands where Tate & Lyle and our associated companies are employers and taxpayers(Lyle of Westbourne 1954, 11).

Not only was 'Tate's' a multinational before the term was coined but arguably from an advertisers and PR perspective, a trailblazer of American methods and techniques. With the subsequent conception of an iconic cartoon champion of free enterprise values, Tates created what remained arguably the most famous and politically successful sugar lump in history!

Whilst spreading and diffusing an understanding of the country's economic difficulties was a commitment enshrined within the Voluntary Plan, it was effectively pre-empted by a Government 'shopping list' that included sugar. The life of the Voluntary Plan appeared endangered: it seems inconceivable that big business could remain true to the pledge to further national objectives when those stood in direct opposition to their own interests. Thus at the end of 1948, the FBI, conscious of the growing discomfort of many in business at the prospect of supporting a socialist government often entirely contrary to their own outlook, reached the decision that the 'Voluntary Plan' was no longer appropriate.

At a meeting of the Standing Committee on Advertising of 13 December 1948 it was decided that it would not be necessary to extend the Plan into a second year on the understanding that the Chancellor might accept this proposal on the condition that the spirit of the scheme continued to be adhered to, namely, 'general economy in the scale of advertising expenditure and discretion in the form and style of advertisements' (MRC MSS 200/F/E5/11/7). In March 1949 the government agreed to drop financial clauses restricting expenditure on advertising but retained the clause that advertisers would, 'refrain from extravagant spending and to continue to attune their copy, where possible, to support national objectives' (The Advertiser's Annual).

With the restrictions on expenditure removed, alongside the creeping spectre of Labour's Clause 4, the gloves were off with 1949 standing out as a key year in the history of British marketing and advertising as expenditure increased by 40.15 per cent year-on-year (The Advertiser's Annual).

In 1949, some four years after the end of the war, businesses in Britain became more confident in shaking off the worst strictures of the Second World War, post-war austerity and gloom, and prepared to take a more aggressive and proactive approach to their growth. Clearly, marketing had a central role to play within that and, most obviously above-the-line advertising. This growing confidence was not only a response to a fundamental shift in attitude but was also due to changes within the legislative environment and the relationship between business and government. Oliver Lyttelton, Conservative MP, wartime President of the Board of Trade and opponent of nationalisation, speaking as President of the Advertising Association was keen to declare in 1949 how we was,

> encouraged to think that advertising is beginning to emerge from the restrictions and limitations which have, for nearly ten years, imposed a brake upon natural development (quoted in The Advertiser's Annual, 11).

Notwithstanding the bias of the speaker and the propagandistic nature of such an announcement, this represented a sea-change in the attitude of business in general and the marketing industry in particular as they decided to shake off the shackles of 'responsible behaviour' that they had initially been so keen to foster through the Second World War but which now represented an unwelcome restriction on their practices in a rapidly changing world. As far as business was concerned, they had acted with aplomb through the years of war and in the first, post-war years but now the time had come for them to have a greater degree of freedom to operate, as might be best characterised by a free market economy. In his 1949 clarion call, Lyttleton praised the advertisers for their good conduct:

> On being asked to make voluntary restrictions in expenditure, the advertising industry has carried out the wishes of the Chancellor and demonstrated its good faith and its readiness to co-operate in the interests of national recovery (quoted in The Advertiser's Annual, 11).

However, within that saccharin commendation was a hint that enough was enough and now was the time to return to normal, free-market practices. Given Lyttelton's own political position and his long-standing ties with the business community, it seems clear that this was a politically fuelled call to action that almost sought to challenge the post-war consensus and exhorted business to start standing up to the insipid socialism of the Attlee administration.

Marketing and advertising were clearly drawn into politics and appear to unequivocally position themselves on the Right: marketing and advertising were set to become key symbols of defiant private enterprise. This oppositional approach was keenly felt within the Advertising Association as they determined to take a more proactive approach in order to protect the interests of their members.

Advertiser's Weekly, quoting Sinclair Wood, the chairman of the Publicity Committee of the Advertising Association, reports the intention to launch a public relations campaign in response to,

> The urgent need for a long-term policy to resist the attacks of "people with power who are opposed to advertising" (4 August 1949, 204).

The long years of cooperation with the government, and even a sense of restraint and responsibility to the broader direction of society dating back to the years of war, came to an abrupt end in 1949 as business and marketers questioned their place within society and their place within the political spectrum. Sir Frederick Bain, the Director of the FBI argued on the threshold of 1950 that 'we in industry have been slack, I think, in not getting over the simple, plain facts' and 'if that is the purpose of publicity, then the sooner we get down to thinking seriously about how to put the matter right, the better' (quoted in Rogow 1952, 214). The gloves were definitely off.

MR CUBE AND THE POLITICISATION OF COMMERCIAL MARKETING

From 1949 those in commercial marketing decided that they were no longer prepared to sit quietly by as the Labour Government threatened their very livelihood. Marketers effectively became key spokespeople in opposition to the politics of the Left. The post-war Labour government had made their position quite clear in regard to the place of marketing in post-war Britain. In the first instance there was a suggestion that the actions of business in promoting their goods might indeed be contrary to the national interest, hence the Voluntary Plan designed to curtail such activities. Even after the Voluntary Plan had been wound up, the leading advertising trade press, Advertiser's Weekly, pointed to the ambivalent attitude of the government towards marketing practices citing the recently published report of the Committee on Resale Price Maintenance that,

> The system by which manufacturers purposely differentiate their products from those of other manufacturers, and actively promote their sale by advertisement and other means, is not, generally speaking, in conflict with the public interest (16 June 1949, 534).

Unsurprisingly the more vocal members of the advertising industry feared the growing spectre of state intervention that the Attlee government represented and which many in the marketing and advertising business determined to set themselves in direct opposition. Sinclair Wood, the Chairman of the Advertising Association's Publicity Committee, cautioned,

> We have moved into an era in which, under whatever Government, the overall planning of our industrial and commercial life is to some extent the business of the State, and the State – the people who govern us and administer the law – will have a powerful voice in the control of advertising, the spheres in which it is to operate, and the conditions under which it is to work (quoted in Advertiser's Weekly, 4 August 1949, 204).

For Sinclair Wood at least, there was a definite opportunity for a state of direct confrontation in which the advertising industry stood diametrically opposed to the present system of government and against which they felt obliged to trumpet the place of free market enterprise, promoting its virtues to the British people and encouraging them to come around to their way of thinking, especially in opposition to the government's policy of nationalisation. According to Wood.

> in this country there are people with power who are opposed to advertising, who would handicap and indeed abolish it, and that the general public, whose word will in the end decide what is to be the future of advertising, are hearing more against advertising than in favour of it (The Journal of the Advertising Association, January/March 1949, 10-11).

Business was alive to the need to actively promote their place within a free market economy and clearly saw marketing as the key vehicle via which to achieve that: reaching out directly to the people, appealing for their support and, in the final analysis, asking them to act against the government of the day. They moved to work not only on narrow issues specifically related to their 'legitimate' area of interest but also sought to more broadly influence attitudes and outlooks, shift public and political opinion.

The encroaching influence of government, most manifest through the Labour government's policy of nationalisation, became a key rallying call as business moved to protect their interests and persuade the people to support them in this quest. In response to those critics which argued that 'Politics and advertising don't mix', Advertiser's Weekly responded, 'This may be a misleading generalisation in these days when government policy touches industry at so many points'. They went on,

> All advertising, even straight advertising to sell a product, must influence thinking before we can secure action. One cannot, therefore, draw a rigid distinction between commercial advertising and advertising designed to sell an idea rather than a product or service. Advertising to sell such ideas as bigger production, harder work, road safety, hygienic habits, is accepted without question. Why quibble, because it

raises a political issue, at advertising to sell the idea that private enterprise is better than State ownership?

The principle of nationalisation was to be the cause celebre for the marketing industry as they fought outright for the economic system upon which their livelihood and profits depended. Advertiser's Weekly concluded,

> To deny private enterprise the weapon of advertising would be to handicap unfairly in its fight for existence, the main source from which the advertising business draws its livelihood (8 September 1949, 406).

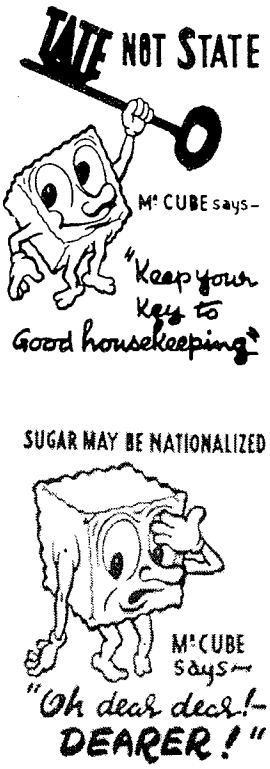

FIGURE 1. SOURCE: ROGOW 1955.

In the minds of those within the marketing industry, to deploy their skills in defence of this way of doing business was entirely appropriate and, as such, the exhortations in direct opposition to the nationalisation of sugar refining were a legitimate practice.

The manifestation of this more politically aware stance of marketing practitioners forcefully came to life in the form of Mr Cube, the name given to an animated sugar lump, the product of the fertile imagination of former Daily Express cartoonist, Bobby St John Cooper. The Tate & Lyle campaign team used a worthy Anglo-Saxon version of Rene Goscinny's protégé, Asterix the Gaul, to wield the 'sword of free enterprise' on thousands of sugar packets exhorting 'Tate not State' (Lyle 1954, 124-5). Much to the chagrin of Labour's Roman centurions Cube first appeared in the Evening Standard on 28 July 1949 before jumping off the page and becoming omnipresent on the packets which sweetened the nation's breakfast tables. His daily appearances and warnings that nationalisation threatened 'dear, dear, dearer' prices, and 'State control will make a hole in your pocket and my packet', provided more than just British housewives with political food for thought.

In its determination 'to fight nationalisation with every weapon at their command' Tate & Lyle forged a close partnership with Aims of Industry (AoI) 'a non-profit organisation specialising in public relations' (Wilson 1951, 228). AoI was formed in 1942 when H. G. Starley of Champion Sparking Plugs Ltd, called a meeting of top industrialists and warned them of the need to be prepared for launching an offensive against socialism:

> The nucleus of an organisation was then established to ascertain the reactions of industry as a whole, and to accumulate essential data, against the time when conditions permitted 'Aims of Industry' to operate on the scale originally contemplated by the Founders (Wilson, 1951, 228).

This right wing propaganda body's real activity did not start until 1946 and intensified as the Labour Government implemented its 1945 election programme. Such was its clout, contacts and expertise that Advertiser's Weekly described AoI as 'a body of public relations storm troopers' (8 September 1949, 414). AoI vehemently denied accusations of being an 'underground Tory' organisation, a declaimer which was as convincing as its claims to be apolitical.

The other side of the dollar was Tate's willingness to import state of the art American advertising and public relations methods to defend their industry from nationalisation. From the late 1940s according to Rogow, 'British business public relations experts...closely studied the American experience, and...developed a number of similar methods and techniques' (1955, 130). The Mr Cube campaign symbolised this aggressive break from staid British custom and tradition and AoI was Tate's exemplary PR expert. They proved 'outstanding in the vigour and skill with which they organised their anti-nationalisation campaign' (Rogow 1955, 142). The campaigning was described by one observer as possessing 'a New York or Washington flavour about it' (Rogow 1952, 215).

Propaganda was sent out to schools, mobile vans toured the country, while more than '3,000 speeches or lectures were delivered to factory and working men's clubs, youth and university organisations, women's clubs, schools, and even groups of soldiers in His Majesty's Forces'. Mr Cube appeared each day 'proclaiming anti-nationalisation slogans...on more than two million sugar

packages, on 100,000 ration book holders distributed free to housewives by Tate and Lyle, and on all Tate and Lyle delivery trucks' (Rogow 1955, 142). If, as the company proclaimed, he had nothing to do with politics, his campaign and defiant gestures were patently designed with the intent of dissuading voters from voting Labour. That task was assisted by shopkeepers who passed on millions of leaflets, and 'over-the-counter chit-chat informed harassed housewives that all the inconveniences of rationing and shortages stemmed from Labour Government bungling' (Wilson 1951, 233).

A sugar sponsored film unit toured the country and produced a seven minute film called All in Favour. It was 'to be shown throughout the country in factories and workshops, women's institutes and men's clubs' and 'the stars are the men and women of Britain' who were arguing for the Government to leave sugar alone (Tate & Lyle Times, November 1949, 4). Richard Dimbleby, the well known broadcaster of the BBC radio series Down Your Way visited the refineries at Thames and Plaistow 'with an open mind and an open mike' to search out the views of Tate's workers. Their 'stay as we are' views were, 'astonishingly unanimous' and fit in with an image of a company which in the inter-war years had actively set out to encourage a 'family spirit' with its employees (Tate & Lyle Times, November 1949, 4). AoI set out 'to persuade workers in all industries that 'socialism' meant the loss of many benefits of benevolent paternalism as practiced in family businesses such as Tate & Lyle' (Wilson 1951, 234). Dimbleby's visits to the principal refineries not only confirmed company paternalism and harmonious industrial relations but amplified the sound of workforce interviews by making them available on 4 million twelve inch records which were rapidly distributed to organisations throughout Britain.

For Rogow, three key messages were emphasised via this incredibly powerful advertising medium: under nationalisation choice will be restricted; sugar will cost more; and that quality would decline (Rogow 1955). According to Reynolds News, one of the few newspapers sympathetic to Labour, sugar packets allowed Lord Lyle (increasingly known to the Press as 'Lord Cube') and his spiritual son, Mr Cube, to 'force political propaganda on the public' (Wilson 1951, 236). Despite protestations from Tate & Lyle, de facto there were no separate spheres delineating politics from business in the late 1940s and the debate and play on the 'P' word is all the more noteworthy for the issues it raised about the fetters and constraints on commercial marketers and business.

As already outlined, one of the key features of the Voluntary Plan was that marketers and advertisers adopt an approach that appreciated their broad influence within society and their responsibilities: the FBI noted how one of the guiding principles regarding business taxation in general within the new Labour administration was governed by a desire to promote 'social desirability' (Minutes of the meeting of the Special ad. hoc. Committee to consider the advertising proposals in the Autumn Finance Bill 1947, 29 November 1947. MRC MSS 200/F/3/E5/11/7). However, as the environment shifted and the most draconian measures represented within that plan were relaxed, so business came to interpret those social responsibilities in a manner unintended by the government of the day.

Many business sectors determined that they had a social responsibility to provide the other side of the case to nationalisation. Commercial concerns had shown great restraint and responsibility through the war years in promoting messages that were deemed to be exactly in accord with the national well-being and likely to promote the proper conduct of the war, even in the immediate post-war period they had demonstrated a willingness not to drive up inflation, particularly through the promotion of scarce or rationed goods. However, when it came to the nationalisation of sugar it was felt by those in industry that they had an equal responsibility to warn the people in regards to the folly of this government plan. Marketing was being turned to useful purpose once more under Mr Cube's initiative and in turn helped educate a broad range of society of the 'facts' relating to sugar refining in Britain, even if that did mean stopping short of apprising the public of the fact that Tate & Lyle were effectively a 'free enterprise monopoly'.

It was determined that commercial marketing had a responsibility to educate the people in regard to the advantages of a free market economy. The crux of the matter, as far as marketing was concerned, was that all they were doing was providing sufficient information to the British people upon which they could base a decision. Nevertheless, this position and attitude clearly stood in stark contrast to that of the elected government and inextricably drew the business of commercial marketing into the political arena. The anti-nationalisation campaigns were inescapably political in nature despite protests that they were not intended to attack the Labour Party but rather the principle of nationalisation. As Lord Lyle said himself at the Tate & Lyle AGM of April 1950,

> I have repeatedly said that our campaign has nothing to do with party politics. This is still true, but if it happens that legislation is contemplated by one political party and not by others a campaign such as ours is bound to take on a political flavour (quoted in The Times, 5 April 1950, 11).

Irrespective of the various protestations, commercial marketing had entered the political fray and a new role for such practices within British society was forged.

In the face of nationalisation it might be argued that business took a rather generous approach to the interpretation of their 'social responsibilities'. Whilst it might be argued that freedom of expression was a key

feature of parliamentary democracy, there were those who expressed grave concern regarding the undue influence that such organisations might bring to bear, not least in government. Morrison and the Attorney General, Hartley Shawcross, postured hard in that legal direction at the end of 1949, 'attacking the iniquities of the Conservative Party's fund raising and the dishonesty of their refusal to disclose the big business sources of their income' and Tate & Lyle's spending of 'vast sums of money on anti-Labour propaganda' (Donoghue and Jones 1973, 447).

High profile confrontation had made the public aware of the threat to sugar and six weeks before the notice of dissolution, Morrison declared impassionedly in a speech at Birmingham, how,

> nobody objects to these concerns putting forward a reasoned statement of their views on nationalisation or other matters affecting them, but when vested interests throw the full weight of their financial resources into political controversies...and do it not by reasoned and objective statements of fact to MPs and candidates, or by speeches, but by expensively publicised vote catching slogans and wholly tendentious propaganda, grave questions arise (quoted in Nicholas 1968, 72).

There were many within the advertising industry who looked on askance at such campaigns fearful that business was spreading its influence just a little too far, in a direction for which there was little legitimacy, and which threatened to bring the name of advertising into disrepute (see Bernard Ash, 'These Harm Advertising', 'Letters to the Editor', Advertiser's Weekly, 8 September 1949, ii). Nevertheless, the battle lines were drawn with business and marketing railing on the Right in opposition to the continued Leftward swing towards a socialist state by the government. To paraphrase French social critic Roland Barthes, it was Mr Cube's 'pure spectacle of excess' that demonstrated the real art of the possible to a receptive world of advertising and PR (Hall (ed.) 1997, 36).

THE EMPOWERMENT OF BRITISH COMMERCIAL MARKETING

Previously the Government had embarked on an 'Information Campaign' to describe planning methods and goals in its Economic Survey for 1947. Even The Times explained the intensive education and information campaign being undertaken as 'necessary' and stressed 'a general desire...even eagerness, on the part of all kinds of publicists to give full assistance in this national task'. Although this information campaign was of substantial scale it failed to produce the desired results and a study by the Central Office of Information showed that the campaign had had 'little effect on the thinking of the average British citizen'. The key factor 'was the language employed'. The Times again noted that 'it seemed to be directed at that minority of the public which can be persuaded to form its thought by the study of economic treatises, not at the mass of the people' (Rogow 1952, 204-6). A Mass-Observation (MO) study reflected on the lag between Government intent and actual achievement, noting that although 'ordinary people are interested in and concerned about serious issues' they 'can only think and talk in their own version of our language'. Commercial as opposed to public advertising would never 'talk down' to people or conflate popularisation with vulgarisation. The conclusion reached by MO was that 'the White Paper would have lost nothing by being written more directly' and 'the effect could have been enormously greater' (Rogow 1952, 207).

What the Mr Cube campaign had proven was the great reach and effectiveness of ostensibly commercial marketing activities when turned towards a goal apparently disconnected from the base aim of shifting product. The success of 'commercial marketing' in this respect inescapably drew the industry into politics and carved out a new role for such techniques within society. As Labour's majority was cut to just six in the 1950 General Election, from whence they descended into further contest in 1951, largely as a test of the public's faith in their policy of nationalisation, many within advertising and marketing acknowledged that their actions in opposition to that policy would draw them further into the fray. Sir Patrick Gower, the Chairman of the Advertising Association's Parliamentary and Public Affairs Committee, cautioned that measures ought to be taken to 'meet criticisms and attacks that would inevitably be made during the forthcoming General Election' (19 September 1951, HAT AA 4/1/4). Within this now highly politicised environment, the place of advertising and marketing was apparently well known and those industry bodies steeled themselves for a barrage of attacks which they felt would be an inevitable consequence of the actions that they had taken in terms of speaking out against nationalisation.

Yet, what becomes particularly pronounced is the notion that it was marketing and advertising that would come under attack rather than business in general: clearly given the blatant nature of advertising as the vehicle for those anti-nationalisation messages, its place in society was called into direct question. This was a point that had been raised earlier by a Mr Eric Little who reckoned that whilst the use of marketing and advertising in delivering political messages was likely to solicit the initial response from the public of 'Pooh! That's only advertising!' such messages like those of the Mr Cube campaign 'touch them on a sore spot' and, subsequently, the public will 'blame advertising' (Advertiser's Weekly, 15 September 1949, ii). Many were uncomfortable with this new role for marketing and advertising and Advertiser's Weekly looked forward to the day 'when advertising ceases to be a shuttlecock in the political game' (8 December 1949, 436).

However, it was now difficult to deny that the strongest weapon in this remarkable campaign had 'turned out to be an ingenious publicity man's conceit, the figure of 'Mr Cube'' (Nicholas 1968, 72). His defence of sugar refining and disclaimer of party politics was legitimated on 'educational' and legal grounds although the business journal Scope was candid enough to admit that the 'deceptively frank avowal of political disinteredness' was 'as much a ritual as throwing spilt salt over the left shoulder' (quoted in Rogow 1952, 222). In an unprecedented sugar campaign the practical reasons for ritual salt throwing were everything to do with electoral law and tax benefits.

The unintended consequence of Morrison's revulsion at Tate & Lyle's tactics and the threat by Sir Stafford Cripps not to allow tax relief for Tate's advertising expenditure, 'plugged' Mr Cube free of charge! According to Crofts, 'The anti-government press gleefully seized this further opportunity to acclaim the Little Man's courageous defence against a gang of unrepentant bullies' (1989, 216). Indeed the litigious saga of Mr Cube and the Board of Inland Revenue was sparked off when 'H.M. Inspector of Taxes stated that expenses incurred in the campaign were not eligible for deduction against tax' (Hugill 1978, 172). Tate & Lyle maintained that its expenditures were 'solely and exclusively laid out for the purpose of the trade' and this unprecedented legal battle dragged on into 1954 and up to the Final Court of Appeal, the House of Lords. Their Lordships found in favour of Mr Cube and 'Sir Stafford had been wrong' (Hugill 1978, 173).

The consequence of all this was that Tate & Lyle discovered the advantages of notoriety in defying both electoral and tax law. Their tactics were vindicated when Mr Cube's judicial encounter with the Inland Revenue 'established at the very minimum that heavy expenditures undertaken by any firm threatened by public ownership have a very good chance of being treated as expenses for tax purposes' (Rogow 1955, 151).

This 'empowerment' of British commercial marketing was clearly proclaimed by an American speaker at the International Advertising Conference in 1951:

> The great truths of civilised living and happiness, the major principles of peace and prosperity, the wisdom of the world's wisest men, can be packaged and presented, distributed and sold as cornflakes are sold, by tried and proven commercial methods (Rogow 1955, 152).

On the morning of 23 February 1950, as the nation went to the polls in the General Election, alongside the cornflake packets on the nations breakfast tables were millions of sugar packets, sold by 'tried and proven commercial methods', but containing an essential political additive of 'Tate not State'. The effects of that additive, according to the Associate Professor of Politics at Princeton University, should not be exaggerated, 'Far Eastern policy, the cutback in meat supplies, steadily rising cost of living, and the continuing housing shortage' (Wilson 1951, 241) probably had more influence. Mr Cube did not swing the election but he successfully intimidated the Government and that political lesson was never forgotten by Labour and its formidable adversary.

However, what is more, this episode served to politicise the commercial marketing industry and push them in new directions in terms of this role within society. Thus, according to Rogow,

> Encouraged by his performance, and pushed on by shareholders who had been impressed by the Lyle campaign, the directors of British Industry by 1950 had become an active and determined opposition to the Labour Government' (1955, 77).

Rogow claims this to be the 'chief significance' of the Cube campaign, as 'it launched Aims into large-scale public relations on behalf of British industry, and at the same time encouraged similar campaigns by other industry related organisations' (1952, 218). The cement industry for example, contrived both confidence and effective method from Cube's pioneering efforts. Anti-nationalisation slogans appeared on cement trucks and on cement bags but it was fortunate that a Mr Concrete did not materialize to compete with Mr Cube on the nations breakfast tables!

The shift in public opinion away from the Government and the disinterment of the hatchet of war between the main political parties from 1947 onwards coincided with the end of the fragile truce between Government and Industry. On one side of the divide was a Socialist Government favouring continued austerity and controls, and a further tranche of nationalisations. On the other side of the widening divide, disgruntled consumers and housewives, particularly south-eastern suburban voters, were positioned next to the threatened companies fighting for free enterprise, but secretly supported by the Conservative Party's 'extra-parliamentary strategy against nationalisation' (Kandiah 1996, 66). Lord Woolton viewed this strategy as 'the best way to create and mobilise popular support against nationalisation: a party inspired campaign could have been dismissed as politically partisan' (Kandiah 1996, 66). The advantage of such stealth was noted by Labour MP Peter Shore: 'Propaganda for free enterprise reaches the public in a most effective way, for it does not appear to be propaganda or to have any connection with politics'(quoted in Kandiah 1996, 67). There was unmistakeably a bridge between big industry and the Conservatives characterised by movement of 'specialised propaganda organisations of private capital' and what Sidney Finer views as 'a manifestation of the political advantage deriving from wealth' (Finer 1956, 11).

CONCLUSION

The case of sugar nationalisation and the Mr Cube campaign represent a key moment in the history of British commercial marketing. Whilst clearly never in favour of an overtly socialist state which would threaten their very raison d'être, up to this point marketers in Britain had exercised a good deal of restraint in refusing to become openly engaged in the political process. It is argued here that the experience of the Mr Cube campaign significantly changed that and consequently positioned those within the marketing industry firmly on the Right of the political spectrum.

With the landslide victory of Attlee's Labour Government in 1945, the prospect of nationalisation of significant swathes of British industry became a distinct possibility, thereby challenging the very being of commercial marketing. It was apparent that in the wake of this election result industry and their spokespeople in advertising and marketing would be required to take a stand. Yet, between 1945 and 1949, considerable restraint was demonstrated with plenty of evidence that those parties still had a concern to be seen to be socially responsible and keying into the broad themes and attitudes of government. This approach was enshrined in the FBI's Voluntary Plan, even if that was short-lived.

However, the tipping point came in 1949 when the Government made an error of judgement in deciding to pick-off sugar refining for nationalisation. For a variety of reasons this was an ill-considered choice, not least of all because they came up against the substantial power of Tate & Lyle. Here was a cause behind which business could rally and, further, was to become a prime example of how commercial marketing techniques might be used within the political sphere. As Peter Hennessey observes, Mr Cube 'brought political argument to every breakfast table in the land'; for his part he notes how 'he [Mr Cube] was almost certainly my first encounter with politics' (1992, 388). For all parties ostensibly opposed to the Government, the privatisation of sugar demonstrated the folly of 'responsible behaviour' in the face of a rapidly changing world: it was now quite apparent to those in commercial marketing that there were powerful forces at large that threatened their very existence. Not only was commercial marketing called on to take a political stance but by their very nature that position was to become blatantly apparent to all parties.

Through the experience of the Mr Cube campaign from 1949, advertising and marketing in Britain were to become blatant symbols of defiance as they unequivocally stood in direct opposition to the creeping spectre of State intervention and the extending control of business. Where commercial marketers might have argued that they had demonstrated 'social responsibility' by not exciting consumer demand both through the war and in the first post-war years, they now argued that they had an equal social responsibility to provide the other side of the story to the public in the case of nationalisation. In 1949, commercial marketing in Britain was resurgent, feeling a degree of confidence to 'go their own way' even where that might appear to be in opposition to the elected government. Mr Cube demonstrated the extent of the power of commercial marketing techniques which could now reach into a more generic, political sphere. The reaction to the government's proposal to nationalise sugar represents a significant rite of passage for commercial marketing in Britain as industry reasserted its independence from government after the long-years of restraint and responsibility that stretched back to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, if not before.

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